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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the advocacy movement for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms, especially the meaning of this movement for children who are deaf. First the ideology of the militant push for full mandatory inclusion is considered. This ideology is seen as having been fueled by two events. The first event was the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which focused on providing all children with a "free and appropriate public education" in the "least restrictive environment." The ideology of mandatory inclusion is seen as actually contradicting the law and defying the logic of how individual needs can best be met. Second, the civil rights rationale underlying the U.S. Supreme Court decision 40 years ago that banned racially segregated schools has been applied to educational placements for children with disabilities. Instead of safeguarding the rights of children, inclusionists are seen as denying children the right to attend school in alternative settings. The reality of inclusion for many deaf children is considered, and research is cited showing that the social communication between hearing and deaf children in inclusive settings is predominantly negative and does not promote social assimilation. Difficulties with using an educational interpreter are identified, including the denial of normal peer interaction to the deaf child and serious pedagogical limitations to an interpreted education. The paper urges educators not to abandon the continuum of alternative educational placements for deaf children in favor of mandatory full inclusion. (Contains 11 references.) (DB)

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18th INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON EDUCATION OF THE DEAF
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The Adverse Implications of Full Inclusion for Deaf Students

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The Adverse Implications of Full Inclusion for Deaf Students

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Today I would like to talk about the advocacy movement for the inclusion of disabled children in general education classrooms, and especially the meaning of this movement for children who are deaf. When I say the "the advocacy movement for inclusion" I am talking about the militant push for full mandatory inclusion -- a movement that has gathered quite a bit of momentum in the United States in the last several years.

First I will talk about the ideology of inclusion, and in particular two important and influential events. Next, in contrast to the ideology of inclusion (and I remind you that I mean full mandatory inclusion), I will present some of the educational realities of inclusion for deaf children.

The present-day movement for inclusion of disabled children in regular classrooms in the United States has a very specific history that relates to national values about the assimilation of immigrants and the need to prepare workers for the growing demands of capitalism. It also grew out of A.G. Bell's intolerance for manual communication and his fear that deaf people would create a separate race of human beings. Other parts of history had a role, too. I do not have the time to discuss them here. If you are interested, there is a longer discussion of these influences in a paper that will be published in the Congress Proceedings.

I *would* like to mention two important events that have fueled the ideology of the inclusion movement.

The first is the 1975 law known as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act. The basic concept of this law is that all children are entitled to a "free and appropriate public education" in the "least restrictive environment." Further, it must be to the "maximum extent appropriate" with non-disabled children, in the "least restrictive environment." In other words, the law requires us to provide the right kind of education for each child, and it favors a learning environment that promotes social interaction between disabled and non-disabled students. It also requires that a "continuum of alternative placements" be made available -- a range of alternative possibilities -- in regular classes or special classes or special schools or residential institutions or some other arrangement. The law is clear that an individual decision must be made for each individual child.

In complete contrast, inclusionists emphasize that <u>all</u> disabled children be placed in the same setting -- the public school regular classroom. In addition, they believe that social integration comes first, and academic learning comes second. In fact, the inclusionists would abolish special education as we know it.

This ideology contradicts the law, and its logic does not make sense. If all kinds of learners are thrown together in one classroom, it is impossible to plan for the unique needs of each child. In addition, most educators of the deaf do not put social development ahead of cognitive development.

Why do inclusionists support such misguided ideology? Why do they want to get rid of the continuum? In the United States, most inclusionists speak for children with serious developmental disabilities. In the past, the inappropriate use of the continuum

has hurt these children by permitting schools to exclude them from general education. The main goal of inclusionists is to normalize the experience of retarded children by enabling them to socialize with non-disabled children. They also hope to encourage sensitivity in non-disabled children and regular classroom teachers toward disabled children. However, it is a serious problem, as I hope to show, when an ideology that may make some sense for one group of disabled children is generalized as the solution for *all* disabled children.

The second important event that has fueled the ideology of the inclusion movement is the U.S. Supreme Court decision forty years ago that banned racially segregated schools because they were thought to be inherently unequal to integrated schools. Recently, inclusionists have tried to validate their demands by borrowing this civil rights rationale and applying it to educational placements for disabled children.

Just as the inclusionist logic about getting rid of the continuum of alternatives was wrong, this logic is also mistaken. Inclusionists use the term "segregation" when they talk about separate schools or classes. In the United States, the word "segregation" has strong connections with slavery. It has a powerfully negative meaning. There is a big difference between separating children because of race and separating them because of learning style. When some disabled children are placed in special classes or schools, it may not be negative -- in fact, it may *contribute* to positive development and learning.

Inclusionists claim they are safeguarding the rights of children. Actually, they are *denying* children the right to attend school in alternative settings, a right that many of those children would certainly benefit from. Carrying the inclusionists' argument to its

logical conclusion, historically Black colleges, women's schools, and programs for the gifted would be ruled illegal and disappear. All of these programs benefit both special groups and society as a whole.

I would like to end the discussion of inclusionist ideology and talk now about the *reality* of inclusion for many deaf children.

Claire Ramsey (1994) has carried out important research on the failure of inclusion to meet the social and academic needs of many deaf children. She points out that inclusionists do not support their assumptions with any theory of human development and learning, and they do not take into consideration the culture or history of deaf people.

For example, inclusionists often say that deaf children's communication abilities and social assimilation will be enhanced through contact with "normal" children. Ramsey's study found the opposite. Hearing children's attempts at communication through sign language were often distorted and abrupt. Usually their attempts at communicating with deaf children were unintelligible. Hearing children often invented gestures and waved their hands at the deaf children, believing they were communicating effectively. They learned that tapping a deaf child's shoulder got her attention, and some did this as though it were an entertaining trick. We know that peer interaction *can* be a positive force in development and learning, yet the interaction for these deaf children meant annoyance and confusion.

When the hearing children's communication *was* intelligible, it resembled "caretaker-like" language. The hearing children signed to the deaf children in the

manner that human beings talk to their pets -- they gave orders and evaluated the deaf children. The hearing children told the deaf children what to do and judged the deaf children's responses to commands. Ramsey found that the judgments were generally negative, often using the sign NO and a stern glare.

The interactions of the deaf and hearing children did not appear to promote social assimilation of the deaf with the hearing or general learning. The powerful social life that children can build through shared talk and activity simply did not exist for the deaf children in the hearing classroom. Ramsey says, "The deaf children were addressed and regarded as exotic, semi-domesticated pets, not as bona fide students, for whom high social and academic expectations could be upheld."

I would like to discuss another part of the objective reality of inclusion for deaf children, and this part draws on the work of Betsy Winston, an interpreter trainer. Inclusionists often believe that any problems with placing deaf students in regular classrooms can be solved by using an educational interpreter. They mistakenly believe that interpreting is a simple substitute for direct communication and teaching, and that an interpreted education is an "included" education.

While interpreting *can* provide much *information*, an interpreted education is a second-hand education. No matter how skilled the interpreter, the teacher, and the student, the interpreter is always a kind of artificial filter between student and teacher. The process of taking in material presented in one language and then rendering this material in another language always changes the original message somewhat before it reaches the deaf students. Deaf students are not receiving an education through

interpreting; rather, they are receiving an *interpreted* education, an education processed through a third person, the interpreter.

Winston (1994) describes the specific implications of an interpreted education for deaf children.

Many deaf children come to school without skill in *any* language, and interpreting is not useful for them. Language acquisition requires interaction and *direct* communication; interaction occurring through an interpreter is indirect. Imagine yourself trying to learn Russian and computer technology at the same time! In fact, these students are *excluded* from learning. Deaf children should not be expected to succeed in inclusionary settings until they are linguistically ready to process the language presented by the interpreter.

Winston also points out that socially, the presence of an interpreter denies the deaf child normal peer interaction. An interpreted education means that the deaf child is constantly connected to an adult; every interaction includes three people, not two. It is not a normal social experience to have an adult there when you ask someone for your first date. You cannot whisper secrets with another classmate through an interpreter. The "included" deaf student is actually excluded from normal peer and teacher interaction.

Winston talks about the serious pedagogical limitations to an interpreted education. Interpreting always lags behind actual interaction. Therefore, deaf students who rely on interpreting are at best always a few phrases behind others. Their constrained interactions and learning can easily undermine confidence and self-esteem

and leave them feeling lost and inadequate.

Interpreting adds to the visual processing tasks of the deaf student. Often interpreting happens simultaneously with other visual input, such as demonstrations, writing on the board, or visual media. In these situations, interpreting does not provide access; rather, it gets in the way of access by adding a competing visual message. Deaf students' access is also limited in lecture formats, question and answer sessions, reading aloud and group discussions.

I am not against inclusion. Inclusion is an important part of the continuum of education alternatives, but it does not meet the needs of most deaf children. Deaf children are a diverse group of learners and therefore need a variety of settings. When decisions are made for them, we must remember the social realities of mainstreamed settings. These issues are poorly understood and rarely addressed by most inclusionists.

I believe that arguments for abandoning the continuum of alternative educational placements for deaf children in favor of mandatory full inclusion are irrational because they are not based on empirical evidence. It seems that many inclusionists do not understand the limitations of mainstreaming or the need for choices. This misunderstanding can have tragic results for deaf children.

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